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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000117

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO AL

SUBJECT: "LOVE IS IN THE AIR:" PM BERISHA PROMISES
COMPLETION OF JUDICIAL AND ELECTORAL REFORM BEFORE BUCHAREST

Classified By: Ambassador John L. Withers II, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) Prime Minister Berisha provided Ambassador with a very positive account of prospects for electoral and judicial reform, including the assertion that he believed opposition leader Edi Rama was dealing with him fairly and without subterfuge. In a separate meeting the same day, Rama provided fewer specifics but was similarly positive about cooperation. At the moment, prospects for significant action on Albania's two crucial reforms appear to be good, and relations between majority and opposition have never been better. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) In a wide-ranging February 12 meeting, Ambassador told PM Berisha that the U.S. had seen positive signs about reform, but remained concerned that some Allies would welcome any excuse to delay an invitation to Albania, particularly in the event of a Greek veto of Macedonia's invitation. Failure to deliver electoral and judicial reform could provide just such an excuse.

JUDICIAL REFORM

¶13. (C) Berisha immediately agreed, saying "These reforms are very serious for Albania and the reforms will be completed." He said the first judicial reform law would be concluded the same day. (News reports and our contacts confirmed that on February 13, Parliament's Laws Committee concluded its review of the 45-article bill on the Organization and Functioning of the Judicial System, the fundamental legislation dealing with organization of the courts.) Berisha predicted this piece of legislation would be voted by the full Parliament the week of February 18. Legislation was also needed on reorganization of the prosecutors' offices, but that, the PM said, would await Prosecutor General Ina Rama's return from her ongoing IVLP in the U.S. Berisha expected PG Rama to bring concrete ideas about the legislation back from her experience in the U.S. Nonetheless, he predicted this legislation would also pass quickly. (Note: In fact, additional legislation beyond these two bills will be needed for a complete and thorough reform of the judiciary, as well as full enforcement of legislation already on the books. However, passage of these two bills would certainly count as significant and concrete progress.)

ELECTORAL REFORM

¶4. (C) On electoral reform, Berisha told the Ambassador that Socialist Party (SP) leader "Edi Rama and I have agreed on almost everything." He confided they had been engaged in direct talks. The PM said both SP and his own Democratic Party (DP) would have difficulties with their smaller coalition partners, but "we will keep on. We will keep communicating and we will agree." Berisha promised electoral reform would pass "soon," before the Bucharest Summit. He added that work on voters' lists and ID cards was proceeding apace. (Note: At a February 14 meeting, ODIHR representatives on a periodic review of electoral reform progress also commented on the noticeable change in atmosphere. They found parties engaged in substantive discussions on the type of electoral system to put forward, although the ODIHR representatives worried small parties could block progress if SP and DP were not reassured that perfect consensus was not a demand from the international community.)

AMAZING ATMOSPHERICS

¶5. (C) Encouraging as were the Prime Minister's evaluations of concrete progress on the two crucial reforms facing Albania, even more remarkable was his characterization of interactions with the opposition, and in particular, with SP's Edi Rama. He said several times, in reference to both judicial and electoral reform, that both sides had compromised, both sides were raising their issues openly, and that relations were good. He concluded by saying "We are on the right track, and this climate can continue. We are all working fairly."

¶6. (C) Ambassador met separately with Edi Rama the same day. While Rama was not as forthcoming about the specifics of reforms underway, his attitude and demeanor were equally positive and he also indicated relations were far better with

COMMENT

¶7. (C) We are not popping champagne corks yet; in Albania, progress can come unglued very quickly. However, for the time being, euphoria over Kosovo's expected imminent declaration of independence and the prospects of achieving the unanimously supported goal of a NATO invitation may be building bridges and erasing egos. Should real reform, both judicial and electoral, actually be achieved before the Bucharest Summit, it will be as the result of the type of non-partisan cooperation in the national interest that we have always advocated. Should an invitation come at Bucharest, it will be important for the international community, particularly the USG, publicly to recognize all parties' contributions to the effort, not just the government's. END COMMENT.

WITHERS